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ABSTRACT

Under the leadership of a new superintendent, Nebraska City (Nebraska) school district coordinated curriculum across the K-12 grades and schools by involving the teachers and community. At multiple department meetings, staff held conversations about student performance objectives. Community conversations were held with a cross-section of parents, board members, patrons, and students to address student outcomes. These conversations resulted in a statement of beliefs. Drawing from these efforts, teachers attended summer workshops to develop and implement district-based teaching and learning standards, which resulted in a series of "learner will..." statements and student performance objectives. Language arts and reading were addressed the first summer, but other subjects were discussed in subsequent summers as the workshops became institutionalized. These statements were not unique, but the process of developing them generated communication across schools, grade levels, departments, and the community about common curricular concerns and focused on students and their learning rather than teacher behaviors and student performance on standardized tests. The district established a curriculum advisory council made up of staff, parents, and the community to maintain community involvement. To avoid teaching to the test, a national standardized test was supplemented by a locally-developed test and classroom teacher assessments. When the state adopted standards in 1998, the district successfully applied for a waiver by demonstrating it could meet or exceed the state standards. Four appendices present student performance objectives, a statement of beliefs, learner will statements, and assessment comparisons. (TD)

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Anticipating State Standards: Nebraska City Schools

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With the pervasiveness of, and political significance attached to, the use of state standards, it is worth asking what all this has in store for rural schools and school districts. In that state standards are intended for everyone, it may be the case that they are no good for any one school or district, or any student for that matter, in particular. We might surmise that this puts rural schools and districts in a special predicament in that standards for everyone—a universalized and decontextualized system of accountability by definition—may import what Craig Howley (1997) refers to as "cosmopolitan" values at the expense of local values. Consequently, in working to cope with imposition of State Standards rural community schools and districts may take themselves further away from their own community concerns and values in light of universal and cosmopolitan goals. Stanadrds may take rural schools away from their strengths, values and, indeed, their own communities.

To contribute to the conversation about researching the relationship between rural schools and state standards, we treat this as an empirical rather than speculative matter and examine what one school district in rural Nebraska has done in response to the creation and imposition of state Standards. Nebraska City Schools is notable, if not recognized, for its preparation and implicit anticipation of the new Nebraska State Standards.[1] In the years after the board's hiring of a new superintendent, the district embarked upon, and subsequently institutionalized, a process of curriculum development and assessment. By doing so the district situated itself to deal directly and confidently with the newly created Nebraska State Standards, which are currently under revision as this is written, as are the controversial and presently undetermined assessment requirements. Our claim is that by previously looking inward to themselves and their community, instead of outward to experts, systems and procedures removed from the Nebraska City community, Nebraska City Schools was able to deal assuredly with the new state standards,

to not view them as yet another external underminer of local control, and eventually become a model for the State Superintendent of Schools in his campaign to stave off a state-mandated, "one-test," assessment.

Setting: Nebraska City Schools and Community

Nebraska City is the county seat of Otoe County in southeast Nebraska. Known as the home of Arbor Day, Nebraska city has a population of around 6,000. The school district serves a total of 1,400 students in two elementary schools, a middle school, and a high school. The economy is diverse, and not as dependent upon agriculture as the surrounding communities dotting the countryside. The community serves as home for many mid-level managers of manufacturing plants, production-line workers, and nuclear engineers. A state college and community college campus is located on the town's western edge, and is busy with evening continuing education classes. Many new residents are either middle- to upper-income professionals or low-skilled laborers in the farm fields or manufacturing plants. The economy of Nebraska City is, roughly speaking, neither growing or shrinking substantially, but maintaining a constant on development and stability. The new professional residents are populating the key economic and civic leadership posts, including the school board. They bring a set of beliefs more akin to metropolitan centers across the country.

Despite its large population and shift in residents' characteristics, community members and school personnel indicate that they see Nebraska City as a "rural" community. While it may not meet federal or academic definitions of "rural," community members regularly and firmly distinguish their Nebraska City from the state's metropolitan areas. This seems to be for two primary reasons. One, Nebraska City is a regional trade center in a vastly agricultural county.

Driving down main street, one sees a county courthouse, a Godfather's Pizza restaurant, Tom's Diner, a farm mechanic shop, and Pete's Feed and Seed. More significantly, however, is Nebraska City is within one hour's drive of both the capital city of Lincoln (pop. 210,000) and the Omaha metropolitan area (collectively with a population of around 750,000), the state's two largest metropolitan areas. When asked what distinguishes Nebraska City, community members almost automatically contrast their town to these areas, which are both growing steadily in population and economic and political influence. John McNeilly, a Nebraska City transplant and the high school science department head, and leader in the development of local science standards, indicates "I see us as rural. I've lived here 20 years and I have always considered this town rural. I've lived elsewhere and know what urban is like. This is small-town, rural." Cindy Meyer, a Nebraska City native who recently stepped down as the executive director of the Chamber of Commerce, remarks, "We are heavily effected by rural issues such as the agriculture economy. We're a small community with rural values. I like the values of a rural community. The comfort zone we have with our safety, being kind to one another, caring enough…to build a relationship that is life-long lasting. You're not going to get that every place you go."

Yet, it is possible to detect some struggle with cosmopolitan values. Jim Dutton, a retired engineer at the nearby Brownville nuclear power station, moved from Michigan to Nebraska City in 1987. Jim indicates that he sees "this community in transition… slowly moving to more, I really hate to say, cosmopolitan. This community is maturing in its world-view away from the parochial, local, farming community [to more] like a larger community." President of the Otoe County Bank, Doug Friedli, who grew up in a rural community two hours west of Nebraska City, concurs with Jim Dutton: "It's a small community in terms of 7,000 people. But in terms of the overall economy, it's diverse. Agriculture is part of it, but we also have industry, and tourism.

We have a lot of people that live here and commute into Omaha and Lincoln, just 45 miles away. So, it's not urban. But, we're close enough to those urban areas that we're kind of cosmopolitan." It is not clear to us how the competing identities of cosmopolitanism and agrarianism affect the community-held value of local control related to schooling in Nebraska City. It does, nonetheless, indicate a potentially significant social transformation of a community historically rooted in a rural identity whose schools are confronting the demand to deal with universalized state standards.

Origins: A New Superintendent

The story of the present capacity for Nebraska City Schools to deal with the imposition of state standards reaches back to 1993, when the Nebraska City school board hired its current superintendent, Dr. Keith Rohwer. The previous superintendent became embroiled in controversy. He was ultimately fired for embezzlement. Six new board members, in a 9-person board, were elected in the aftermath. Finding and hiring a new superintendent was the board's immediate task and offered an occasion for them to take action for district development. The board decided that in addition to overcoming the troubling and demoralizing effects of the previous superintendent's administration, which left the board's and administration's relations with the teaching staff strained, it wanted a district leader that had apparent expertise in curriculum and could improve the teacher evaluation procedures. Tom Farrell, a local real estate agent, one of the six newly elected board members in 1993, and had been a teacher in Nebraska City from 1980 to 1984. He points out:

> Frankly [before] Keith, there was not always this trust between board and administration on one side and the teaching staff on the other. There really wasn't communication until it was time for negotiations. Then all of a sudden you'd have these opposite sides of difficult things. When we [school board and Dr. Rohwer] came to the teachers and spoke to them and asked them to do things as professionals, it helped start building a good relationship of working together on other issues.

Similarly, Debbie Schallenberger, a life-long resident of Nebraska City, elected to the school board in 1993, holds, "The 1993 issues for school board campaign included needing a different superintendent, class size, a stronger curriculum. We don't have any less budgetary issues than other schools. But, we don't consider that as important to having a curriculum in place."

There is vagueness to what the board members desired in what they considered a "curriculum person." It is not at all clear what they took to be "curriculum." But these board members do indicate that they were dissatisfied with the former school administration. This provided something for them to react against and thus they offer some sense of what the new superintendent was to accomplish. In addition to curricular matters, the new board was interested in dealing with teacher evaluation. They are similarly vague about this, and they framed the issue in terms of needing to change the teacher evaluation documentation or forms that were used. They weren't confident that the forms were detecting incapable teachers.

In his interviews with the board, and in his early subsequent decisions, Dr. Rohwer linked curriculum development to teacher evaluation. As he reports, the board's primary concern for him was to work on teacher evaluation. He indicates that he communicated to the board members

that "we would certainly attack [teacher evaluation], but the first thing we are going to do is to get in mind what we are going to teach. Because without knowing what kinds of things we were teaching and wanting to teach, it was pretty hard to go in and evaluate instruction."

This was not merely a general stance Dr. Rohwer took. His view flowed from his assessment that in this small district "there had never been any conversations about curriculum" across the K-12 grades or across schools; it was "done building by building, grade level by grade level, and by department." Consequently, this fragmentation left the community with a fragmented picture of what the district was doing in curricular matters, fueling the board's concerns.

To address this multifaceted concern, one of Dr. Rohwer's first actions in his first year was to call a meeting of the entire staff to begin what he habitually calls a "conversation" on K-12 curriculum. He began by asking the staff to address a general question: "If it were your son or daughter leaving Nebraska City Schools, what would you want her or him to know and be able to do?" This question was addressed at the elementary grade level and middle and secondary-level department meetings throughout the 1993-94 school year.

These meetings resulted in a document of "Student Performance Objectives" (see Appendix A). These are broad objectives composed of "Working Definitions" around communication, problem solving/critical thinking, global awareness/historical perspectives, citizenship, social skills/life skills, fine arts/humanities and technology. The superintendent admits that "there is nothing magical" about these definitions of objectives. Similar kinds of objective or goals statements are found in practically all school districts. Moreover, because of their very pervasiveness, it could have been easy for the district to simply borrow some other district's objective/goal statements. In Dr. Rohwer's words, "We could have gone out and said to some district 'Send us your stuff.' They would have sent it to us and it would have gone in the drawer."

His concern was around "ownership" of the process; a matter of "who did the grunt work." The notion "ownership" is pervasive in the talk of the superintendent and the teachers in our own conversations and interviews with them about their curriculum development.

The Group of 100

Following the development of Working Definitions of the Student Performance Objectives, the superintendent in February and April of 1995 convened meetings with a cross section of community members. These community conversations involved parents, "patrons," board members and students. Patrons included local business people, employees and chamber of commerce members. The parents and students were randomly selected. The students were drawn randomly from high school lists. The superintendent stayed away deliberately from members of the student council and the honor society, the traditional or obvious student body representatives. As he sees it, "we wanted some kids who would test us," avoiding students who were typically compliant toward adult authority and for whom schooling is generally unproblematic. The collection of community members came to be known informally as "The Group of 100."

This Group of 100 was divided into seven working groups. These groups were facilitated by Nebraska City School staff members, mostly teachers who had been engaged in the development of the Student Performance Objectives and Working Definitions. The charge of these groups was to address the outcomes they thought were important for students leaving Nebraska City Schools. The superintendent was emphatic that teachers lead the Group of 100 meetings so that their emergent "curriculum model" is somehow immediately connected with those who carry out instruction and most directly involved in observing student learning. Further, this was intended to keep the community conversation from becoming a public relations show with and for

selective community members. The results of the meetings of the working groups, and subsequent meetings of the entire Group of 100, are encapsulated in a "Statement of Beliefs" that was made public (see Appendix B).

The superintendent and teachers acknowledge that these belief statements, like the Student Performance Objectives, and their working definitions, are hardly unique in and of themselves. Something similar is found readily in many schools and districts. However, echoing the value of ownership, Dr. Rohwer avers, "the key is, it's *ours*" (emphasis added), and "the representatives of the community are openly engaged." These statements became a touchstone for any further curriculum developments, reports the superintendent, of which "we constantly remind our folks to set the stage for *any* of our work."

Institutionalization of Curriculum Development and Local Standards

Nebraska City Schools adheres to an established, State Department of Education mandated (for accreditation), "seven-year curriculum study cycle" for curriculum development. Each year in this cycle a subject or content area is scheduled for revision and development and these include mathematics, social studies, health and fitness, fine arts, and vocational education. In Nebraska City Schools, the seven-year cycle is further broken down into concurrent 3-year sub-cycles or "stages." The first year is an "assessment and development stage." The following year is considered an "implementation stage," and the third year a "maintenance stage." In Dr. Rohwer's first year, 1993-93, reading/language arts was on schedule for the first assessment/development stage of the cycle. This is significant, as we discuss below, because for the following two years, reading/language arts was the first content area addressed under Dr. Rohwer's leadership. Moreover, literacy is the content area for which the State Department of

Education requires a report, in year 2000-2001, on how a district plans to meet or exceed the state's new literacy standards and assessing them.

In the summer of 1994, following this year of community conversations, Dr. Rohwer asked his teachers to come together for a workshop on the development and implementation of district-based teaching and learning standards and to draw from these community conversations in the Group of 100. The 1994-95 year was the maintenance stage year for language arts and reading. In this summer workshop, all teachers were asked to participate to the development of these standards at their grade levels around language arts and reading. Dr. Rohwer had secured a grant to help compensate the teachers for their time. While this pay amounted to around $10/hr, this is hardly professional pay. For the teachers, the symbolism of the remuneration was important nonetheless. Sherry Gundlach, the a high school writing teacher and language arts/reading coordinator for the development of these district-based standards, emphasized that this "was *something*, to tell the teachers that their time was valuable," and the teachers reacted favorably to what is otherwise required time outside of their contracted schedules.

While the 1994-95 was "an implementation year" for reading/language arts, the summer of 1994 fell between school years and followed on the heels of the community conversations with the Group of 100, the first year of grade level meetings, and development of the Working Definitions of Student Performance Objectives. The summer workshop resulted in an initial series of "Learner Will Statements" (see appendix C), loosely linked with the Student Performance Objectives.

These Learner Will Statements embody the outcome of the summer workshop. They also provide a conventional language that is used not only in reading/language arts, but across the curriculum in the ongoing process of curriculum development. They provide institutional

touchpoints for the ongoing development of curriculum and for assessment. This process, developed in 1994 and through 1995, became institutionalized.

Like the Statement of Beliefs and the Working Definitions of Student Performance Objectives," Learner Will Statements are hardly unique to Nebraska City Schools. Many district employ this language. But, the superintendent requested this language for two interconnected reasons. One, it is a common language for a district that had not had conversation across schools, grade level, and departments about common curricular concerns. Seconds, it supplants the more traditional behavioral language of "teaching objectives" previously used in the district. This, the teachers indicate, was important in that it directed and directs their conversations toward students and their learning, rather than on teacher behaviors and student performance on standardized tests.

Teachers now continue to meet every summer and over the school year in the development of the Learner Will Statements within the framework of the seven-year curriculum study cycle and three year stages. The statements are thus used as points of reference for further curricular development and assessment procedures. Effectively, curriculum development is no longer relegated exclusively to individual schools, grade levels, and departments who previously came together only every seven years to develop a specific content standard. Rather, these conversations take place across schools and grade levels, beginning each summer and through the academic year, for the refinement of the Learner Will Statements. This occurred for all subject areas beyond reading and language arts since 1993-94.

We find that what Nebraska City Schools had been developing these past years, and until 1998, is their own locally-developed standards for curriculum and instruction, without regard for any potential state standards or external pressure. They were meeting, at a basic level, the state-

mandated 7-year curriculum cycle. Sherry Gundlach laughs when asked to compare the curriculum development (within the 7-year cycle) prior to 1993 and the hiring of Dr. Rohwer. "Before," she says, "we would drag off the shelf the last [reading/language arts] from years ago, make some adjustments, buy some new textbooks that were aligned with them—and we often know what books we were going to use and the books would drive our decisions—and then put it back in the shelf to collect dust."

Maintaining Community Contact

Throughout the institutionalization of ongoing development of local standards, Nebraska City Schools has established a Curriculum Advisory Council. This group is made up of all of the middle and secondary department chairs, teacher representatives from each of the schools' grade levels, and administrative staff. The Council has a standing invitation to members of the school board, parents, and the community. This Curriculum Advisory Council is one ongoing effort on the part of the district to maintain the connection with the community started in 1994 in the Group of 100 *around local standards.*

Board member Tom Farrell, a frequent participant in the Curriculum Advisory Council Meetings, indicates that this has contributed to overall community confidence in the district and schools. "People are involved in the community [and] can see that education is important in their lives…I think that they're very comfortable with our superintendent…and with the board leadership." Cindy Meyer similarly indicates that "through Keith's leadership, our school system has come to a level that is tremendous. This involvement from the community did not use to happen. Now, anytime there is an issue, like assessment, Keith has involvement from the board, students, elder residents, taxpaying adults, working age adults, and teachers. Information is

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gathered from everyone. This is why I think our school meets our community needs because they actually know what the community needs and wants are."

Notwithstanding the public relations tone of these board members' remarks, when contrasted with Dr. Rohwer's predecessor, the previous board's (and community's) lack of substantive contact with the schools, and a fragmented public knowledge of curricular matters, does indicate to us that generally shared sentiment among local standards (and assessment) have developed not only parallel to enhanced community connection, but as an important part of the general process. In short, we see that Nebraska City Schools, through the leadership and collaboration with Nebraska Schools staff, those who do the hard "grunt work", looked inward to their community as an important part of the building of local standards.

Emergent Assessment System Within Curriculum Development

Important to this process of local standards has been attention to assessment concerns. It is interpreted by the teacher and administrative staff that public accountability, as well as actual accreditation, requires some form of testing. The superintendent was convinced, and the teachers were clearly resigned, that they did not want testing to drive their decisions and be left, in the common refrain, teaching-to-the-test. At present, Nebraska City Schools uses three kinds of assessment connected to and emanating from their "Learner Will Statements." First, it employs a norm-reference or national standardized test (NRT), Terranova most recently. This test is administered to students in grades 4, 8 and 11. Second, the district uses locally-developed, criterion referenced tests (CRT) that are aligned with the Learner Will Statements. These tests are given to students in grades 3, 5, 8 and 10, and are often referred to as "student benchmarks."

Third are local or classroom teacher assessments. The classroom assessments, like the criterion reference testing, are connected to the Learner Will Statements and are presently under development. These are outgrowths of the classroom assessment that teachers are used to using, like observations, performance tasks, etc. The teachers generally consider classroom assessments their most important work in regard to the meeting of their own standards. These are their locus of control in assessment and part of the ownership of curriculum development. For them, these buffer or mitigate inclinations toward teaching to the test.

These three assessments are used in two ways, according to the teachers and the superintendent. In one direction they are documentary, offering multiple ways to demonstrate accountability to the community of the school work in teaching and instruction. Second, they are used as curriculum development tools. Together they are an iterative device, they claim, rather than the perfunctory seven-year adjustment to the curriculum cycle. All of this "tightens" the relationship between the Learner Will statements, generated via staff, teaching and instructional assessment, and general assessment. Teachers and superintendent are adamant that the assessments are not driving what they develop in Learner Will Statements. "We're in charge of the assessments; they are not in charge of us," one teacher old us.

This emergent assessment system has crystallized just this past academic year as a full-blown policy for reading/language arts (see Appendix D). This is due, in part, in response to the Nebraska State Department of Education requirement that districts demonstrate how they are meeting or exceeding the new state standards and how these will be assessed, which we address below. But, the district was headed toward this conclusion already, having set in motion the curriculum model involving Learner Will Statements.

Nebraska City Schools and the New State Standards

The development of Nebraska City's curriculum and assessment offers potentially rich heuristic ground for further inquiry into the relations between such local policy making and teaching practice, and ultimately student learning. Our present concern, however, is the relation between the development of local or community-based standards and its encounter with state standards. By May of 1998, the State Board of Educational adopted state standards in the major content areas, math, since, reading and social studies. Nebraska was the 49th State to do so. These standards are notable for their banality. The are not overly specific in content detail. They are organized around what "students should know and be able to do by the end of grades 1, 4, 8, and 12." Reading and mathematics have "strands",[2] social studies have "content areas," and science has "unifying concepts and processes" (see www.edneb.org/IPS/Issu/AcadStand.html). They each contain prefatory remarks on how the standards are to be used and thought of, namely as broad guides for local districts. None contain any description of the quality of instruction needed to achieve these standards (only briefly suggested practices), what teachers need to know and be able to do to fulfill them, or any clear reference to learning theory. They are ultimately descriptions of curricular content, long checklists of what ought to be included in curriculum and addressed by the time a child complete grades 1, 4, 8 or 12.

What makes these standards remarkable is that they have not (yet) been connected to or "aligned" with standardized examinations. There is currently an ongoing political struggle around the assessment of the current standards and whether and how they could be tested, legally and soundly. But until April, the State indicated that there was no single test that every school must use. Moreover, each district was allowed to develop their own version of standards and

assessment procedures that demonstrate that it is meeting or exceeding those of the state standards.

This state of the state standards has been good news for a district like Nebraska City which has developed its own robust, homegrown standards and assessment procedures. All districts were notified that the first reports they were required to make to the state were their plans for meeting/exceeding the state standards and their assessment procedures in reading/language arts. Nebraska City Schools, as we noted, began their curriculum development in language arts/reading in 1993 (as part of the seven year cycle) and this was the first in 1993 under the leadership of Dr. Rohwer. Language arts/reading had been a preoccupation since 1993 and was on the calendar for development in the 2000-2001 year of the seven-year cycle. By late 1996, it became clear to Nebraska City Schools that state standards were on their way. "The writing was on the wall," as Sherry Gundlach put it. Through the institutionalized development of local standards, the district was able to pose itself to report to the state what they have been doing and how this can meet or exceed State requirements in language arts/reading.

Consequently, Nebraska City Schools had channeled their language art/reading process to connecting them with the standards. The result is a document that demonstrates how its curriculum work is now aligned with standards, and how these assessments address the areas and strands of the state standards. Appendix D includes excerpts from this documents which will be sent to the state as Nebraska City Schools seeks a "waiver" from the state, effectively releasing them from other options (selection from a handful of standardized tests to commissioned by the State) in assessment. This report is due in the 2000-2001 school year. Nebraska City Schools has sent it in a year early, this spring. With pride in their voices both, the superintendent *and* Sherry Gundlach say, "We are ahead of the game."

One consequence of Nebraska City's work isthe attention it gained from State education officials. Dr. Rohwer had been in contact with the State Commissioner of Education about Nebraska City's local efforts to "exceed" the state standards. So impressed was the Commissioner, that he asked Dr. Rohwer to accompany him to the State Capital to testify about Nebraska City School's efforts, their own "local control" of standards that would satisfy the state. The Commissioner is on record for indicating his skepticism of the mandate of a single assessment device, the so-called "one-test", for measuring all schools and districts on how well they are meeting the standards, and then publishing these results in comparative fashion. This implicitly creates implicit "high stakes" scenarios, inviting further legislative action and state intervention in schools and districts who are not measuring up to the standards. In short, he was expressing concerns about undermining local control of schools. Nebraska City Schools, along with other districts who have engaged in similar curriculum and assessment efforts, was held up as a model of local control, of how a district can meet the demands of state standards on its own.

Meeting the Standards and Community

When we consider the place of standards in place based reform, we have not focused on specific curricular matters that are "place-based." We have not addressed for instance, the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center that teachers and students are creating. Our concern, rather, has been the place of the local community in the development of standards and what one school district has done in their local efforts and how, by and through their local efforts, it was prepared to cope with state standards. The process set in motion in 1993 by the new Superintendent in the development of local standards and subsequently a locally-developed assessment plain, situated Nebraska City ahead of the game. They not so much anticipated the standards as were prepared

for them when they arrived. The state standards are more outlines than detailed prescriptions, Because they wer not state-mandated, and because schools could apply for a waiver if they demonstrate that they met or exceeded the standards and assessment, Nebraska City was able to confidently meet these demands of the new state standards.

Most importantly, from our view, is that Nebraska City Schools began its local standards development by looking inward to itself and to its community. The district did not begin with calling in outside experts on what they should be doing. It did not work in heavy-handed, top down fashion that is highly effective but ultimately demoralizing to the agents of change and implementation (the school people who do the "grunt work") and constraining of future change. This demonstrates for us the capacity of a local community, rooted in a rural identity, to pull together around substantive curriculum matters.

Of course, we are left with a string of questions. These include larger issues of representation and voice of the community in local standards development. Nor, have we explored how curriculum is being played out at the ground level, in classrooms, between teachers and students and the organization of instruction. We have not asked some of the more trenchant policy questions of whether and how this process enables a capacity for teachers to grow, change, learn the high quality instruction that reformers, urban and rural alike, are suggesting be part of the "core" (Elmore, 1996) concerns of all schooling. What we can point to, however, is what we find to be significant in our sketch of Nebraska City Schools. If rural communities, or those that view themselves with rural identities, consider themselves under siege from the state education establishment, through the creation of universalized and cosmopolitan standards that disregard local concerns and culture, then a school district's capacity to look inward to itself and its community for support and guidance in the crafting of local standards and policies seems to be

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an important condition for substantial change. It may not be sufficient, but it seems necessary if schools are to play any role in the survival of local rural communities. To borrow from Cornelia Flora, social and human capital is being constructed when "communities" and school authorities look inward, rather than outward, to determine the kind of learning experiences and outcomes that are to be expected of children and young adults. Community and school initiative can come to be based on a sense of responsibility, and a shared future vision. Further, by building first on internal/local resources communities begin to overcome a victim mentality (Flora, 1999).

Epilogue

In February 2000, the State Attorney General, who is running for U.S. Senate, issues a decision that the current Nebraska State Standards are too vague to be tested and that any state mandated test would not be able to withstand a constitutional challenge by a school district. He suggested that the standards be re-written more precisely so that a test can be aligned specifically with the content demands of the standards.

In April 2000, the State Legislature debated and amended a bill, Legislative Bill 812 (LB812) that would have created a single text for the state standards. The State Commissioner of Education lobbied heavily in the legislature against the creation of a single test. The compromise in the bill resulted in the provision for a single test in writing. It also provided for 4 optional assessment plans, yet to be determined. The state will, in all likelihood, select from four plans submitted to it for consideration. These four plans will then be the options that all school districts must choose from. Nebraska City Schools, because they are ahead of the game and prepared to send their language/reading arts plan in a year ready, will submit this as one model plan.

Effectively, this bill has undermined the incentive, if not the capacity, for school districts to set out to accomplish what Nebraska City has done with their local standards. It may be the case that if Nebraska City Schools' plan is accepted as one of the four, that some district may seek to embark on their own community developed standards and Learner Will-like statements, grounded in their own communities. This seems unlikely. Why would anyone want to go to the trouble of doing their own thing, when the State says you only have four to choose from?

Upon hearing of the news of LB812, Dr. Rohwer reports that it was a central topic at the most recent school board meeting and meeting of the Curriculum Advisory Council. "We are proceeding as planned," he told us. Nebraska City Schools hold out the possibility that between now and the three years when the state mandates are in place fully, things may change. If they do not, they will maintain the system of curriculum development and assessment. As Dr. Rohwer says, "It's still ours and its the right thing to do."

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Notes

[1] A note on method. The data for this paper is drawn from a series of interviews that we conducted with Nebraska City Superintendent of Schools, school board members, teachers who

hold leadership positions in the district it the development of standards and assessment, community members. We also examined relevant documents and print artifacts from the last seven years related to the d of local standards.

[2] Those in math parallel the National Council of Teacher of Mathematics Standards and strands.

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Appendix A

Student Performance Objectives
Working Definitions
NCA Accreditation Committee
October 18, 1994

COMMUNICATION

Students Will demonstrate the ability to communicate effectively by reading, writing, listening, and speaking - using current tools and technology.

PROBLEM SOLVING / CRITICAL THINKING

Students will demonstrate the processes of thinking, planning, and doing by using the information and resources available to solve a problem.

GLOBAL AWARENESS / HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

Students will develop an understanding of the global community including historical, economic, and environmental issues.

CITIZENSHIP

Students will demonstrate the working skills and knowledge needed to function as responsible citizens. Students will demonstrate an awareness of political, historical, geographical, and environmental issues.

SOCIAL SKILLS / LIFE SKILLS

Students will have opportunities to work cooperatively in an effort to understand the importance of becoming positive contributing members of society. They will also demonstrate knowledge of effective life skills.

FINE ARTS I HUMANITIES

The students, through their own personal experiences and interests, will develop an understanding and appreciation of art, music, and drama.

TECHNOLOGY

Students will demonstrate the ability to use modem technology in everyday applications and adapt to technological advances.

Appendix B

Statement of Beliefs
of the Nebraska City Pubic Schools

1. All learners have worth and dignity.
2. Every individual has the ability to learn and succeed.
3. Learning is a life long process.
4. Learning is most effective in an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust.
5. Education is the cooperative effort of students, school staff, parents, and community,
6. Education is the foundation of democracy.
7. Education prepares students for global citizenship.
8. Students need to be responsible for and actively involved in their learning.

Appendix C

Learner Will Statements

Language Arts Strand: Writing

Substrand: Communication of Ideas

Sixth Grade
TLW

1. Become able to write for a variety of purposes.
2. Demonstrate knowledge of metaphors. similes, idioms, imagery, and personification.
3. Demonstrate the ability to take notes. gather information, outline. and write a bibliography by publishing a simple research paper.

Language arts Strand: Writing

Substrand: Structure of Communication

Sixth Grade
TLW

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the parts of speech by using them correctly in response writings.
2. Demonstrate editing skills from rough drafts.
3. Expand sentences and choose exact words in final publications.
4. List and spell words from an individual spelling list.

Language Arts Strand: Speaking

Sub-Strand: Oral Communication of Ideas

Sixth Grade
TLW

1. Demonstrate appropriate communication skills when giving an organized speech on a researched topic.
2. Demonstrate the ability to give directions, explanations and support for his ideas when presenting a selected publication.

3. Demonstrate polite speaking in group discussions.
4. Demonstrate the ability to verbally gather information for data in a variety of activities: interviews, data charts.

Appendix D

NEBRASKA CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS LEARNER WILL STATEMENT/ASSESSMENT COMPARISON

Learner Will Statements	Where Taught	Tested CRT	Tested NRT	Assessment	State Standard
Language Arts Strand: Writing					
Sub Strand: Communication of Ideas					
Grade Six:					
1. Write for a variety of purposes.	6th L&L Writers Workshop	Yes (sample)	No	Portfolio Writer's Workshop Daily Portfolio	9.1 10.5 11.0 11.2
2. Demonstrate knowledge of metaphors, similes, idioms, imagery, and personification.	6th L&L	Yes	Yes		3.1 3.23.3 10.5
3. Demonstrate the ability to take notes, gather information, outline, and write a bibliography by publishing a simple research paper.	6th KBSS	No	No	Class Assignment Paper Research	1.5 All of 2 5.1 9.1 10.5 11.2 12.1 12.2

L&L = Literature and Language
C&C = Composition and Communication
KBSS = Keyboarding Study Skills
AR = Accelerated Reader

NEBRASKA CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS LEARNER WILL STATEMENT/ASSESSMENT COMPARISON

Learner Will Statements	Where Taught	Tested CRT	Tested NRT	Assessment	State Standard
Language Arts Strand: Writing					
Sub Strand: Structure of Communication					
Grade Six:					
1. Demonstrate an understanding of grammar usage and mechanics.	6th L&L	Yes	Yes	Classroom	8.1 8.2 10.5
2. Demonstrate editing skills from rough drafts.	6th L&L KBSS	No	No	Portfolio Classroom	8.1 8.2 10.1 10.2 10.5
3. Demonstrate ability to use a variety of sentence structures.	6th L&L	Yes	Yes		8.1 8.2 10.2 10.5
4. Spell words from an individual spelling list. Demonstrate ability to spell words correctly.	6th L&L KBSS	Yes	Yes? (proofreading?)		8.1 8.2 10.2 10.5
5. Complete graphic organizers for prewriting.	6th L&L	No	Yes		5.2 9.2

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NEBRASKA CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS LEARNER WILL STATEMENT/ASSESSMENT COMPARISON

Learner Will Statements	Where Taught	Tested CRT	Tested NRT	Assessment	State Standard
Language Arts Strand: Speaking					
Sub Strand: Oral Communication of Ideas					
Grade Six					
1. Demonstrate appropriate communication skills when giving an organized speech.	6th L&L KBSS	No	No	Classroom	14.1 14.2
2. Demonstrate appropriate participation in groups.	6th L&L	No	NO	Observation	13.1 14.2
Language Arts Strand: Listing					
Sub Strand: Interpretation and Understanding					
Grade Six					
1. Apply listening skills in a variety of settings.	6th L&L KBSS	Yes	No		15.1 15.2

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